

January 2015

AZ

Tribal Connection

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Calendar

Feb. 10, 2015: EQIP Interim Rule Comment Period Deadline

Feb. 17, 2015: Local Foods Funding Forum, 3146 E. Wier Ave. Phoenix, AZ 85040

Feb. 18-21, 2015: Commodity Classic, Phoenix Convention Center

Mar. 16-19, 2015: Arizona Association of Tribal Conservation Districts (AATCD) Annual Meeting
Apache Gold Casino & Resort

Reminder!

NRCS accepts applications for all programs on a continuous basis. Contact your local NRCS field office or Tribal liaison for more info.

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State Conservationist Update

A message from Keisha Tatem

Greetings and happy new year! Welcome to another edition of the *AZ Tribal Connection*, where we highlight the partnership efforts of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Indian Tribes we serve.

This month I am encouraging our Tribal partners to attend and participate in all the opportunities available to expand their technical networks, expand knowledge through trainings, and gather information on various Federal programs.

I plan on attending the Arizona Association of Tribal Conservation Districts (AATCD) Annual Training Conference in San Carlos from March 16-19.

At the AATCD Annual Training Conference in San Carlos, NRCS will be providing a very special training

session on our conservation planning process, conservation activity plans, and how to become a Technical Service Provider (TSP). We are encouraging

Tribes to send their staff to attend this training to answer many of the questions we have received about participating with NRCS as TSPs.

I want to bring something else to your attention, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Interim Rule – public comment period. The deadline to make comments is Tuesday, February 10, 2015. Details on the adjustments and how to submit comments are on the last page of this newsletter.



Keisha L. Tatem
State Conservationist
Arizona

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program in Arizona

By Dino DeSimone, Resource Conservationist/Water Resources—Arizona State Office



Stabilizing the bank of the sewage treatment lagoons along Moenkopi Wash near Tuba City, Arizona. Photo courtesy of NRCS

Through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps communities respond to natural disasters that pose imminent threats to lives and property. Funding for the program is provided through emergency congressional appropriations.

The EWP Program addresses watershed impairments, such as endangered homes and businesses, debris-clogged streams and unstable stream banks, and upland areas damaged by wildfire. NRCS contributes up to 75 percent of the construction costs of emergency measures with the remaining amount coming from local sponsors. EWP projects must reduce threats to lives and property, and be economically, environmentally, and socially defensible.

In recent years, Arizona has experienced a number of devastating, large-scale wildfires that have directly impacted local communities. In the aftermath of these fires, these same communities are often subject to severe flooding and erosion damages. In response, NRCS has assisted local sponsors with implementation of EWP projects designed to mitigate these additional damages. Since 2010, the EWP program has helped 12 communities throughout the state recover from the

damaging effects of wildfires and floods. These EWP projects have directly benefitted 4,500 people and prevented an estimated \$10 million in further damages to homes, businesses, highways, and other infrastructure.

As an example, in the summer of 2012, severe monsoon storms contributed to flooding in the community of Tuba City on the Navajo Nation. Heavy flows in Moenkopi Wash led to bank erosion adjacent to the sewage treatment lagoons, threatening the first lagoon. NRCS and the Navajo Nation determined there was an urgent need to stabilize the area. The resulting EWP project employed rock riprap and other emergency measures to protect the bank and lagoon from further erosion and potential failure.

Following the devastating Schultz wildfire in 2010 near Flagstaff, Arizona, NRCS worked with Coconino County on emergency recovery measures, including jersey barriers and sand bags, to protect vulnerable homes and infrastructure. Since the initial response, NRCS and the sponsor have implemented long-term flood mitigation measures, such as earthen berms and constructed channels throughout the community.

For more information about the EWP program, contact your local NRCS field office or visit:

<http://go.usa.gov/JSye>



Canals constructed in a community North of Flagstaff to mitigate future flooding due to the Schultz fire in 2010.

Photo courtesy of NRCS.

Tohono O'odham Farm and Food Working Group Agricultural Day 2014

By Gilbert Two Two, District Conservationist—Sells Field Office

A new partnership has been formed over a short four years to create an experience that is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of students on the Tohono O'odham Nation through agriculture education. The Tohono O'odham Farm and Food Working Group members held the 2014 Annual Youth Agriculture Day, in Sells, Arizona. Students from schools across the Tohono O'odham Nation attended the recent event at the Tohono O'odham Community College campus to learn about growing food.

In 2009, the Agriculture Extension Program developed the Farm and Food Working Group in a collaborative effort with programs throughout the Tohono O'odham Nation including USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The Farm and Food Working Group has annually sponsored this event in an effort to educate the students about agriculture and how it can be a culturally, environmentally, and economically viable way of life on the Tohono O'odham Nation.

The goal is to put into practice environmental priorities established by each program, agency, or school by working together. As a result, future generations of Tohono O'odham gardeners and farmers will be able to produce economically viable crops that meet local, nutritional, and cultural needs.

Community member Jose Enrique described how O'odham in the surrounding communities grew quick-growing varieties, specialized kinds of corn, beans, and squash, which will produce a useable harvest on summer and winter rainfall. Soil Scientist Robert Wilson from NRCS discussed how a large part of our emphasis on soil health is about expanding our focus on soil as a living entity adding, "you can only learn so much about soil by sitting behind a computer in a classroom, you need to experience the soil first hand."

Food Justice was introduced by Anthony Francisco, Tohono O'odham Community Action staff member who pointed out one of the best ways to create food systems that are fair, sustainable, and accessible to all is by coming together, creating community, and sharing what we know.



San Simon School students visit the NRCS booth at 2014 Agriculture Day for information on soil health, pollinators, and more. Photo courtesy of Gilbert Two Two

Tohono O'odham Nation's Rangeland Management Specialist, Amos Stevens, taught the students about the "history of ranching." He explained the rangelands on the Tohono O'odham Nation are a tremendous resource for the people. Harvest of forage, wildlife, and plant food from the land must be managed in such a way that these products can renew themselves. If they cannot, they will disappear.

San Xavier Co-op Farm staff member Cie'na Schlafli, provided a tour of the natural areas on the campus. Cie'na pointing out wild annual plant species such as pigweed, parsley, and annual panic, which were used as greens. Prickly pear, Mesquite, and saguaro were another important food supply shown to the students.

The day concluded with the presentation of the two top essays in the Food Sovereignty Essay Contest. The contest encouraged students to think about the current state of the local food system and its impacts on health and wellness of communities. "Redefining and Strengthening Tohono O'odham Food Sovereignty" by Amy Juan and "Generations of Traditional Food" by Patricia Ortega were the two overall winners. "We congratulate you all on all your hard work and the effort in the future," Nina Altshul, Executive Program Director Tohono O'odham Community Action said in her closing remarks. "Your interest in agriculture is the beginning of a wonderful journey into the cycle of a single seed that feeds and sustains us all."

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Interim Rule—Public Comment Period

The fundamental purpose of EQIP, assisting agricultural producers to implement conservation practices to provide environmental benefits, has not changed. Revisions to the program have focused primarily on expanding participation among historically underserved populations, including special priority for beginning agricultural producers and socially disadvantaged producers with preference provided under these special priorities for individuals who are veteran farmers or ranchers.

The interim rule adjusts the program regulations to correspond to new statutory language. It also includes changes to streamline program implementation and make the participant's contract responsibilities clearer and more transparent. NRCS is also removing definitions for terms that are not used in the regulation and making other editorial adjustments.

Summary of Changes to EQIP made by the 2014 Act

The regulation is organized into three subparts: Subpart A—General Provisions; Subpart B—Contracts; and Subpart C—General Administration. The basic structure of the regulation has not changed; however, NRCS is moving the sections related to conservation practices and technical service providers (TSP) to Subpart A from Subpart B.

To view the document, please go to: <http://go.usa.gov/JSU5>

Visit our “Conservation Assistance for Tribes” web pages! We have information on Conservation Planning and Programs, links and contact information for our partners working with NRCS, past issues of the Tribal Connection Newsletter, and other resources to “help you help the land.”



Conservation
Assistance for
Tribes

Click on this image when you visit our website: www.az.nrcs.usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Deadline to make comments is Tuesday, February 10, 2015.

You may submit comments using one of the following methods:

- ◆ Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments for Docket No. NRCS-2014-0007.
- ◆ U.S. mail or hand delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. NRCS-2014-0007, Regulatory and Agency Policy Team, Strategic Planning and Accountability, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Building 1-1112D, Beltsville, MD 20705.

The new AI/AN Special Emphasis Program Manager (SEPM)

Hello, my name is Erin Boyd. I am a Navajo from White Cone, Arizona. I attended the University of Arizona and studied Range Management and Ecology. I finished college in 2013 and started my career as a Range Management Specialist with the Holbrook Field Office in Arizona.

The American Indian/Alaska Native SEPM provides focus on issues of employment, retention, promotion, training, career development and advancement opportunities affecting American Indian/Alaska Native tribes and employees of NRCS. The SEPM

program is a vital component of NRCS's civil rights program.

I work with Tribal communities by attending job fairs at high schools, colleges and universities to encourage Tribal members to become part of the NRCS workforce. I also promote education of American Indian/Native Alaska native culture to other NRCS employees throughout the year, especially in November which is designated as Native American Month.

I work closely with the NRCS Tribal Liaisons on Tribal issues.

